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Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is prepared in accordance with the multi-year programme of work of the Commission on the Status of Women for 2002-2006, which identified "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels" as a priority theme for the fiftieth session in 2006. The report analyses the current situation of women in decision-making processes and the conditions required for achieving their successful political participation and leadership. It concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

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I. Introduction

1. At its forty-fifth session, in March 2001, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a multi-year programme of work identifying priority themes for 2002-2006, including the theme of "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels", to be considered at the Commission's fiftieth session. The present report is prepared in response to that mandate. In its resolution 58/142, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to include information about women in politics at all levels in his thematic report to the fiftieth session of the Commission and to encourage Governments to provide data on the subject. In response to the resolution, a note verbale was sent to the Member States seeking information on women's political participation in their respective countries.[1]

2. In order to contribute to a further understanding of the issue and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), organized an expert group meeting on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership. The expert group meeting was held in Addis Ababa from 24 to 27 October 2005.

3. The purpose of the present report is to provide an analysis of the current situation of women in decision-making processes, with emphasis on their political participation and leadership at the international, national and local levels, as well as to propose policy recommendations for achieving equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, based on the identification of the most promising practices and lessons learned to date.

II. Background

A. International policy framework

4. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, drew attention to the persisting inequality between men and women in decision-making. The Beijing Platform for Action[2] reaffirmed that women's persistent exclusion from decision-making raised a number of concerns regarding the achievement of democratic transformations and women's empowerment. The absence of women from political decision-making undermines democracy, which assumes that the right to vote and to be elected is to be equally applied to all citizens, women and men alike.

5. The Platform for Action emphasized that "women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved".[2]

6. The Platform for Action defined two strategic objectives in its critical area of concern on women in power and decision-making:

(a) Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making;

(b) Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

7. The Platform for Action recommended the achievement of gender-balanced composition in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administration and in judiciary bodies, including through setting specific targets and, if necessary, the establishment of a positive action policy; the integration of women into elective positions in political parties; the promotion and protection of women's political rights; and the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities for women and men alike. The Platform for Action further recommended the organization of leadership and gender-awareness training; the development of transparent criteria for decision-making positions; and the creation of a system of mentoring.

8. To accelerate the implementation of action in those areas, the Commission on the Status of Women, at its forty-first session, in 1997, adopted agreed conclusions 1997/2, which emphasized that attaining the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making was important for strengthening democracy and achieving the goals of sustainable development. The Commission reaffirmed the need to identify and implement measures that would redress the underrepresentation of women in decision-making, including through the elimination of discriminatory practices and the introduction of positive action programmes.

9. Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women calls upon State parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country. In 1997, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted general recommendation 23 regarding the participation of women in political and public life. It emphasized that State parties should ensure that their constitutions and legislation comply with the principles of the Convention and that they take all necessary measures, including temporary special measures, to achieve the equal representation of women in political and public life.

10. In its resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the Security Council also reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and stressed the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making. In October 2005, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the resolution, the United Nations systemwide action plan for the implementation of the resolution outlined concrete steps to, inter alia, ensure the full participation of women in decision-making, in all areas of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction, including development of constitutions, legislation and administration.

11. In its resolution 58/142, the General Assembly urged Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other actors to develop a comprehensive set of policies and programmes to increase women's participation in decision-making, including in conflict resolution and peace processes, by addressing the obstacles women face in their endeavour to participate. The resolution also

addressed the importance of supporting and generating political will and invited Governments to demonstrate a serious commitment to the promotion of the advancement of women and the goals of gender equality through the organization of awareness-raising campaigns.

12. The 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was carried out at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women held in 2005. Member States reported on the increasing participation of women in decision-making at different levels, inter alia, through the introduction of various measures, including positive action (see E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1). In the Declaration[3] adopted by the Commission, Member States welcomed the progress made, stressed that challenges and obstacles remained and pledged to undertake further action to enhance the full and accelerated implementation.

13. The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments was established, in Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals (see A/58/323), as one of the four indicators for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. During the 2005 World Summit held at Headquarters in September 2005, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the equal participation of women and men in decision-making. Member States resolved to promote the increased representation of women in Government decision-making bodies, including through ensuring their equal opportunity to participate fully in the political process.

B. Conceptual issues regarding women in decision-making

14. The expert group meeting highlighted the need for a distinction between three interrelated concepts: participation, representation and leadership. Participation refers to the act of taking part in politics, including through discussion and debates, lobbying and activism in formal and informal ways, so as to formulate and influence socio-economic and political agendas. Representation is a process by which various actors in decision-making arenas and key social forums in democratic societies convey political agendas on behalf of different constituencies, including political parties, social movements and groups. Leadership refers to the ability to articulate political agendas and translate them into policies and actions.

15. Engagement in decision-making takes place in a variety of contexts, including in social movements, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, political parties, trade unions and business organizations, as well as in elected public bodies, such as parliaments, state and local governments and global social and economic institutions.

16. Women's increased presence in decision-making bodies does not automatically ensure attention to gender equality in political processes. An increase in the numerical representation of women has to be complemented with increased substantive representation or the possibility of influencing political decision-making. In addition, the accountability of all political actors, men as well as women, to commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women is critical for ensuring gender-sensitive outcomes through gender mainstreaming.[4]

17. The political and economic empowerment of women is closely interlinked. Increasing women's access to positions of power can influence policies and strategies for enhancing women's economic opportunities, and the enhancement of

women's economic status can provide better conditions for accessing and effectively participating in decision-making institutions. A deeper understanding of the barriers to women's equal access to employment and productive resources, including capital, is also necessary for creating an enabling environment for the empowerment of women. Women's economic independence is crucial for their exercise of influence on decisions that affect their lives and those of their families.

III. Current trends in women's participation in political decision-making

18. Data on women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels over the past decade has been collected and compiled by IPU and other international and regional organizations (see tables 1 and 2). Information on women's participation was also provided by Governments in their responses to the questionnaire for the 10-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action, and to the note verbale, in compliance with General Assembly resolution 58/142.

Table 1
Women in decision-making bodies, 1995 and 2005

	1995			*2005*		
Position	*Number of women*	*Total number*	*Percentage of women*	*Number of women*	*Total number*	*Percentage of women*
Heads of State or Government	12	187	6.4	8	191	4.2
Presiding officers of parliament	24	228	10.5	21	254	8.3
Parliamentarians	—	—	11.3	—	—	15.7 (Jan) 16.0 (Sept.)
Ministerial positions	—	187	6.8 (in 1996)[a]	858	183	14.3

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Politics: 1945-2005, Information kit (2005).

[a] Data compiled by the Division for the Advancement of Women. (It is important to note, however, that the data is based on different datasets and is therefore not directly comparable.)

A. Women in parliament

1. Global averages

19. According to data collected by IPU, there has been steady progress in women's representation in parliament over the past decade. At the time of the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico, in 1975, women accounted for 10.9 per cent of members of parliament worldwide. In 1995, the number of women in lower houses of parliament increased to 11.6 per cent and reached 13.4 in 2000. The highest representation of women was in the parliament of Sweden (40.4 per cent).

Table 2
Women in parliament 1945-2005

	1945	*1955*	*1965*	*1975*	*1985*	*1995*	*2000*	*2005*
Number of parliaments	26	61	94	115	136	176	177	187
Percentage of women representatives (lower house or unicameral)	3.0	7.5	8.1	10.9	12.0	11.6	13.4	16.2
Percentage of women representatives (upper house)	2.2	7.7	9.3	10.5	12.7	9.4	10.7	14.8

Source: *Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Politics: 1945-2005, Information kit* (2005).

20. According to the latest data compiled by IPU in October 2005, women's participation in parliaments is now the highest it has ever been. Women comprise 16.2 per cent of the representatives in lower or single houses of parliament and 14.8 per cent in upper houses, or an average of 16.0 per cent across all parliaments.

21. One encouraging development, according to IPU data, is that a number of post-conflict countries are listed among the top 30 countries with regard to women's participation in legislative bodies, averaging between 25 and 30 per cent of women legislators. Many of these countries have recognized the importance of including women in their reconstruction processes and the importance of their participation in new democratic institutions. In 2003, Rwanda became the top-ranked parliament, with representation by women comprising 48.8 per cent.

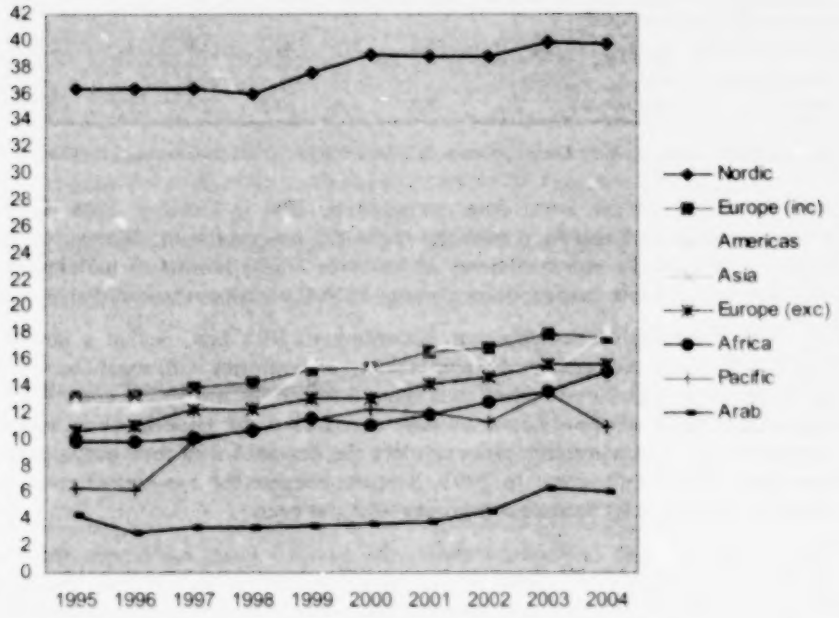
22. Compared with previous decades, the past 10 years have seen the fastest growth in the number of women in parliament. According to IPU data, the number of parliaments with 30 per cent representation of women has increased fourfold. In 1995, women constituted over 30 per cent of the legislature in only four countries, whereas today 20 parliaments have reached the target of 30 per cent women representatives, which is considered to constitute a critical mass of women necessary to bring about real changes in parliament.[2] The concept of building a critical mass of women leaders has proven to be an effective mobilizing tool. A critical mass of 30 per cent should not, however, be used as a ceiling but rather as a minimum standard.

23. According to a background paper entitled "The participation of women and men in decision-making: the parliamentary dimension", prepared by IPU for the expert group meeting, the number of parliaments worldwide in which women representatives constitute less than 10 per cent has decreased significantly from 63 per cent in 1995 to 37 per cent today. As of 30 September 2005, a total of eight countries had no women in their national parliaments: Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saudi Arabia, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and United Arab Emirates. While Bahrain has no women in its lower house, six women have been appointed to the upper house.

24. Overall, progress, while steady, has been far too slow. The Inter-Parliamentary Union estimated that if current incremental rates continue, an average of 30 per cent women in parliament would not be reached until 2025 and parity would not be achieved worldwide until 2040.

2. Regional differences

Table 3
Women in parliament by region, 1995-2005



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Politics: 1945-2005, Information kit (2005).

25. Table 3, above, provides information on women's representation in parliament at the regional level. Since 1995, the Nordic countries, including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, have maintained the highest representation of women, with averages consistently over 38 per cent. In October 2005, the Nordic countries reached an average of 40 per cent representation of women in parliament for the first time.

26. Table 3 also indicates that women remain underrepresented in the Arab countries, where today the regional average in lower houses is 8.2 per cent. While that percentage is half of the global average, it is, however, twice the percentage in the region eight years ago, when the average representation for women was less than 4 per cent. Much of this progress is attributable to the implementation of different types of quotas in the region, including in Djibouti, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco and Tunisia.

27. The Inter-Parliamentary Union data also indicate that women remain underrepresented in the parliaments of the Pacific island countries. The average representation of women in parliament for the Pacific region (excluding Australia and New Zealand, where women's representation stands at 24.7 per cent and 32.2 per cent, respectively) is 3.2 per cent.

28. The most significant increases are found in Africa and Latin America, where on average there has been a gain of more than five percentage points in the past 10 years. Research has shown that, for the most part, the increase in these regions can also be attributed to the adoption of quotas for women.[5]

3. Developments at the national level

29. Important elections have been held recently in post-conflict States. According to IPU data, in the Iraqi elections for a transitional Assembly in January 2005, 31.5 per cent of parliamentarians were women. This was owed in large part to the adoption of candidate quotas by the interim administration in Iraq in 2004, requiring political parties to nominate at least 30 per cent women on candidate lists. According to an IPU abstract, the mechanism of reserved seats for women was implemented in the 2005 elections in Afghanistan.

30. According to the above-mentioned IPU background paper on women and men in decision-making, in May 2005, Kuwaiti women gained full political rights when the Kuwaiti Parliament granted them the right to vote and stand for elections. In Bangladesh, the negative trend of decreased women's participation in parliament was reversed in 2005. At present, women constitute almost 13 per cent of the members of parliament in Bangladesh.

31. The following information was provided by the Member States concerned in response to the note verbale: in Belarus, between 2000 and 2001, the number of women in the Chamber of Representatives increased from 4.5 per cent to 10.3 per cent; women constitute 20.2 per cent of all current members of the Estonian Parliament; since the 2004 elections, 4 out of 12 senators in Grenada are women, including the President of the Senate; and in Poland, after the 2001 elections, the percentage of women in the lower chamber of Parliament increased from 13 per cent to 20 per cent.

B. Women in high-level positions of State and Government

32. Women's representation at top levels of State and Government has not increased to the same extent as representation in parliament. As shown in table 1, the number of elected women Heads of State and Government has actually decreased from 12 women in 1995 to 8 in 2005. There have been some recent positive developments, with two women having been elected to high-level positions, one as President in Liberia and the other as Chancellor in Germany.

33. In the past 10 years, the number of women holding positions at the ministerial level has increased (see table 1 above). In accordance with data on 187 countries compiled in 1996 by the Division for the Advancement of Women, the percentage of female ministers in 1996 was 6.8. Women ministers were concentrated in social areas (14 per cent), compared with legal (9.4 per cent), economic (4.1 per cent) and political affairs (3.4 per cent).

34. According to IPU data, in January 2005, 14.3 per cent of ministers in the executive branch of government were women. Sweden had the highest number of women ministers, at 52.4 per cent, followed by Spain, with 50 per cent. Women held 858 ministerial portfolios in 183 countries. Of the 858 ministerial posts, 83 women (9.7 per cent) held portfolios related to family, children, youth, disabled and the

elderly; 69 women (8.0 per cent) held ministerial portfolios related to social affairs; 63 women (7.3 per cent) held ministerial portfolios related to women's affairs; 63 women (7.3 per cent) held ministerial portfolios related to education; and 60 women (7 per cent) held ministerial portfolios related to the environment and energy. Women were least represented in portfolios related to parliamentary affairs, population and information. Only 12 women worldwide held defence portfolios, 20 women held finance and the budget portfolios, and 25 women were ministers for foreign affairs.

35. The IPU data indicated that positive changes had occurred in the Arab region. In 2001, Yemen had appointed a woman minister to head the Ministry of State for Human Rights, and by 2003, Qatar had named its first woman minister for education and appointed a woman as executive secretary of the Higher Council for Family Affairs. Oman had also appointed its first woman minister in 2003, with Kuwait and Lebanon following suit in 2005. As of 2004, 25 per cent of decision-making posts in the Government of Egypt were held by women.

36. Underrepresentation of women at high levels of decision-making in the area of foreign affairs is also reflected in the appointment of women as country representatives in international arenas. In 2005, of the 191 permanent representatives to the United Nations in New York, only 17 were women, the highest number ever.

C. Women in local governments

37. In 2003, the International Union of Local Authorities launched the first-ever global database on women in local decision-making. According to the database, women presently constitute 20 per cent of the world's councillors (see http://www.iula.org). Information provided by Governments for the 10-year review and appraisal, and in response to the note verbale indicated, in general, an increase in women's participation at the local level.

38. The local elections in Jordan in 2003, for example, were record-setting and resulted in the election of five women candidates and the appointment of 94 women to village councils. In India, more than a million women are now present in different levels of local governance in both rural and urban local governmental bodies. In Iceland, the proportion of women in local government increased from 28.2 per cent in 1998 to 31.2 per cent in 2002. In the Seychelles, in 2002, women were well represented at the local government level and comprised 58 per cent of the district administrators participating at that level. Ethiopia also reported a 10 per cent increase of women in local government from 1995 to 2004. In 2005, women comprised 44 per cent of representatives in local councils in Belarus. Every election at the local level in Estonia since 1999 has seen an increase in the number of women; in the 2005 local elections, 39.3 per cent of all candidates were women, 28 per cent of whom were later elected. In the Republic of Korea, the percentage of women among elected city/provincial representatives increased from 36.4 per cent in 1998 to 67.1 per cent in 2002. In the 2001 Montevideo local elections, Uruguayan women won more than 40 per cent of the local administration seats.

39. According to data collected by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in 13 countries in South Asia and in the East Asia and Pacific subregions, the number of women in local governments ranged from a high of

33 per cent to a low of 2 per cent in 2001. In all cases, those figures were higher than the number of women in the central governments of the respective countries.[6]

D. Participation of women in decision-making in other areas

40. Information and data on women's participation in judiciary bodies is insufficient. Internationally, a breakthrough was achieved with the establishment of the International Criminal Court and the appointment in 2003 of seven women judges out of a total of 18 judges. Based on the information provided by Governments for the 10-year review and appraisal, and in response to the note verbale, women constitute the majority of Supreme Court justices in Nicaragua and Honduras. In Egypt, the first woman judge was appointed in 2003, which set a precedent for the appointment of three other women judges. In Djibouti, women have the highest representation at the magistrate level, with one third of the country's 24 judges being women. In Chile, a milestone in the history of the country's judicial system was reached in 2001, with the appointment of two women, one as a judge to the Supreme Court and the other as a prosecutor. In Slovenia, in 2002, for the first time there was gender-balanced representation of men and women in the Constitutional Court; in addition, a woman held the position of President of the Court. In Belarus, in 2005, women represented 46.4 per cent of all judges and 28.9 per cent of members of the Supreme Court. Women currently hold 25 per cent of the posts at the national justice, federal justice and provincial tribunal in Argentina.

41. Data collection and dissemination is even less systematic in relation to economic decision-making. Women's participation in high-level economic decision-making remains low even in developed countries, despite educational advances for women in many parts of the world. According to research conducted by the International Labour Organization, women's overall share of managerial jobs in the period from 2000 to 2002 was between 20 and 40 per cent in 48 of the 63 countries for which data were available.[7] Very little comparable data exists on the representation of women in the private sector. In relation to women's participation on corporate boards, for example, Finland and Norway have implemented a quota to increase the number of women on the boards of directors of state and public limited companies to 40 per cent. In Norway, an estimated 600 companies are affected by that regulation. A similar initiative was carried out in Denmark, Estonia, Greece and Sweden through a project, "Women to the top", which aims to ensure at least 40 per cent representation by women on the boards of private-sector companies.

42. A concerted effort is required to more systematically collect, disseminate and utilize data on women's participation in all areas of decision-making in public life, including in academia, trade unions, international affairs and the media. Similarly, improved databases on women leaders are needed to provide a resource to those seeking women for leadership positions in national and international contexts.

IV. Conditions for achieving successful participation of women in political decision-making

A. Increasing numerical representation of women in decision-making

43. Electoral systems have a direct impact on women's participation in decision-making bodies. Research consistently shows that women's representation is highest in countries using proportional representation systems. Proportional representation systems motivate parties to balance their electoral tickets. Most majoritarian systems, on the other hand, allow for the nomination of only one candidate per district and parties tend to choose male candidates. Other aspects of electoral system design that influence women's representation include electoral thresholds (the minimum per cent of the vote required to obtain a seat in parliament), district magnitude (number of seats over the number of districts) and open versus closed lists in proportional representation systems (the ability of voters to influence the election of candidates within a party list).

44. Quotas, defined as a mandatory percentage of women candidates for public elections, have become the most widely used mechanism for facilitating the entry of women into representative politics. While in a few countries reserved seats for women existed as far back as the 1950s, the major push for quotas came in the 1990s, with the successful implementation of quotas in Argentina in 1991 and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action urged the use of positive actions to achieve equal representation of women and men in decision-making.[2] According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and Stockholm University's global database of electoral quotas for women, nearly 100 countries had implemented quotas, previously used quotas or were considering implementing quotas. Of those, 10 countries had adopted reserved seat guarantees and 30 countries had adopted legislation mandating quotas. In addition, 130 political parties in 61 countries had voluntarily adopted quotas (see http://www.quotaproject.org).

45. Quotas have been introduced as a result of many different factors, including national debates about the ways in which marginalized groups can be compensated for historical exclusion from public life, internal pressure from national women's groups and external pressures from global institutions, such as the United Nations, and international women's movements.[8]

46. The most common types of quota systems (see http://www.quotaproject.org) include:

(a) Constitutional quotas for national parliaments: quota provisions that are mandated in the constitution of the country. Countries in which such quotas are used include Burkina Faso, Nepal, the Philippines and Uganda;

(b) Election law quotas or regulations for national parliaments: quotas that are provided for in the national legislation or regulations of the country. Countries in which legislative quotas are used include Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the Sudan;

(c) Political party quotas for electoral candidates: rules or targets set by political parties to include a certain percentage of women as election candidates. The African National Congress in South Africa sets such quotas.

47. The type of quotas adopted varies according to the country's electoral system and other political factors. Quotas are likely to be more effective in the context of closed-list proportional systems than in open-list proportional systems. In proportional representation systems, quotas are most effective when there is a high district to party magnitude or where there is a placement mandate specifying which positions women must hold on a party list. For example, a requirement that specifies women are to hold one of the first three positions or two of the first six positions, etc., will be more effective than a requirement that women hold one third of the positions on the list. Effective sanction mechanisms for non-compliance are also necessary. For example, only after the electoral tribunal in Argentina ruled that any party failing to uphold the requirements of the law would have their party removed from all ballots, did the parties begin to comply.[9] In majoritarian systems, the most common type of quotas are reserved seats. In such systems, directly elected representatives have greater legitimacy and independence than appointed representatives.

48. Specific circumstances in political processes can provide opportunities for the introduction of quotas, such as in countries undergoing transition and constitutional and legal reform. It is increasingly common for quotas to be considered as a means of securing women's representation in post-conflict States. In these contexts, quotas have taken varying forms, ranging from voluntary party quotas adopted by the ruling parties in Mozambique and South Africa, to reserved seats and constitutional quotas, most recently in Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq, and Rwanda.

49. Political parties, as the major gatekeepers in determining candidates for elective office, play a critical role in advancing or impeding women's participation in decision-making bodies. The structure, organization and internal culture of political parties determine their likelihood of promoting women candidates. For instance, a party that has poorly defined internal procedures and in which decision-making is dominated by a cadre of party elites, can disadvantage women.

50. At the expert group meeting, it was noted that in some contexts political parties tend to value women candidates for the purpose of mobilizing women voters rather than because women's participation will bring specific knowledge and expertise or will increase attention to gender perspectives in the political agenda of the party. The potential of women to become political leaders often remains unacknowledged. In addition, the pools from which political parties search for candidates tend to be male-dominated, such as those of trade union leaders and local councillors. Political parties should develop incentives to encourage women's participation, such as by providing funding for election campaigns, supporting networks, providing training and skills development for women candidates and setting targets, for example, reserving a certain number of executive positions in the party for women.[10]

51. Institutional arrangements within political bodies, such as political parties or parliaments, are not gender-neutral and tend to favour men. Securing an election requires candidates to devote a significant amount of time to campaigning, which may involve travelling outside of their home areas for extended periods of time. In many contexts, this process disadvantages women, who are constrained by their

family responsibilities and cannot devote as much time to political activities as their male counterparts. In some cases, significant financial resources are also required. In addition, the environment of political institutions is not always conducive to women because sitting times in parliaments, meeting schedules of political parties and lack of childcare facilities often conflict with family obligations, which in many contexts are still mainly carried out by women.[11]

52. Women's movements are important stakeholders in the process of increasing women's participation in political decision-making. Women's groups lobby for equal representation and support women's candidacies. Within political parties, politicians with links to women's movements can put pressure on party leadership to pursue all possible measures towards women's equality in political representation.[8]

53. At the expert group meeting it was also emphasized that the socio-economic position of women in many societies negatively affects their participation in public life. Although women have entered the workforce in large numbers over the past decade, in many parts of the world they still tend to occupy lower echelons of occupational hierarchy than men. As a result, they earn less money and lack the skills and connections necessary to succeed in competitive fields, including politics. In particular at the local level, where participation in public office and community affairs is often on a voluntary basis, women have to balance responsibilities at work, at home and in the community. Most societies have not yet established the conditions which enable men and women with families to share these responsibilities.

54. The issue of women's self-esteem was also raised at the expert group meeting. Many women may perceive themselves as lacking the necessary skills to perform well in politics, which negatively affects their interest in competing for public office. They may hesitate to become involved in party politics and give preference to participating in social movements, which are more egalitarian and more goal-oriented than political parties and state institutions.

55. Training and leadership development are crucial to support women in developing the necessary political skills to successfully run for public office. Gender-sensitive training is also required for men to introduce them to gender equality issues and develop their commitment to promoting increased participation of women in decision-making, including through identifying practical ways to support women's candidacies for public office.

B. Increasing substantive representation of women

56. The participation of women in decision-making processes involves not only the quantitative aspects of representation, but also increasing women's impact on policy formulation and implementation through explicitly advancing an agenda for gender equality and promoting the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into policy development across all sector areas. By effectively increasing the impact of women on public life at all levels, the potential for change towards gender equality and empowerment of women and a more democratic and just society is increased.

57. Three conditions that enhance women's effectiveness in decision-making processes and increase their impact on policymaking were identified at the expert group meeting:

(a) Identifying and working with critical actors and allies;

(b) Developing critical mechanisms/structures that strengthen women's political influence;

(c) Seizing critical junctures or moments where potential to influence the policymaking process is increased.

Critical actors and allies

58. Women need to identify critical actors and allies who can facilitate their access to resources and endorse and actively support a gender equality agenda, leading to gender-sensitive policy outcomes. Through networks at the local, national, regional or international levels, women can, for example, gain access to knowledge, expertise and information from a wide range of organizations and individuals, such as on good practices in policy development or innovative sources of funding. Networking is essential for mobilizing support of constituencies for initiatives to promote the gender equality agenda.[12] Women's networking also effectively supports the development of leadership skills. The power of alliance building and networking was illustrated in the important role of local, national and international women's groups and networks in influencing the preparation and outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

59. Women's political networking should include building strategic alliances with men. Men can play a crucial role in promoting gender equality in policy development. Building effective alliances with men will require addressing stereotypical attitudes, including through increased gender-sensitive education and training, in particular for men in decision-making positions. There should also be comprehensive efforts to enlist media support in promoting positive attitudes towards women's roles in decision-making.

Critical mechanisms/structures

60. The presence of women in top levels of the executive branch of Government is critical to ensure the introduction of gender-sensitive policies and resource allocations in all areas of societal development. However, women are underrepresented at this level and women ministers tend to be given such portfolios as education, health, social welfare or environment. Powerful ministries, such as foreign affairs, defence, finance, trade and industry, remain primarily the preserve of men. Legislative decision-making processes are typically mediated by systems of standing committees. The most powerful committees, including on appointments, appropriations, ways and means, and finance or public accounts, are dominated by men.

61. Access of women to decision-making in budget allocation processes is critical to ensuring gender-sensitive development. Efforts to influence budgets from a gender perspective are increasing, at both national and local levels. Alliances with other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and academia, are important in furthering this work.[13]

62. Women's effective participation and leadership in political institutions can be undermined by a lack of information on critical issues.[14] Access to information is influenced by institutional practices within political institutions. Ensuring effective access to information can be supported by strategic networking and alliance

building. Information and communication technologies also provide potential for increasing systematic access to information. Efforts to explicitly address the gender digital divide are critical to increasing women's participation in decision-making.

Critical junctures

63. There appear to be a number of critical junctures, such as peace processes, transitions to democracy and the drafting of new constitutions, that provide opportunities for increasing women's participation. In those contexts, the monopoly of political parties over representation diminishes and access is expanded to non-traditional political actors, whose organizations or movements may put forward candidates to represent their interests, seek a presence within transitional authorities or lobby through mobilization. These critical junctures, providing for greater representation of the interests of different social groups, may be conducive to the formation of temporary coalitions among women legislators from different political parties around issues of common interest.

64. As evidenced in post-conflict situations in Central America, women's cross-party coalitions managed to overcome the ideological divisions that accompanied the civil wars. During the peace process in El Salvador, women came together to promote reforms on issues such as gender quotas, responsible paternity and domestic violence. During the transition to democracy in Uruguay in the mid-1980s, the all-party Working Group on Women's Status, which had struggled to be included within the National Consensus-Building Forum, managed to draw up a set of recommendations on domestic violence, overcoming traditional rivalries between the two historically dominant parties.

V. Impact of women's participation and leadership on promoting gender equality

65. Women play a key role in formulating gender equality policies and promoting gender mainstreaming, in particular through alliances between national machineries, women's groups and networks, and women in public office. Women's presence in political processes at different levels has, however, proven to be important in the formulation of gender-sensitive policies on development, sustainable peace and good governance. Women legislators in alliance with other actors have made important contributions in advocating for removal of discriminatory provisions from legal codes and promoting women's rights at the national level.

66. During the past decade, the lobbying of the women's movement has contributed to the inclusion of gender equality and women's rights in other global policy fields, including social development, humanitarian law, population and environmental protection; the acceleration of the ratification process of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the increasing attention focused on issues of violence against women in both the domestic and the public sphere. The women's movement has also made major contributions to building partnerships for peace. In Azerbaijan, Columbia, Liberia, Nepal and Somalia, for example, women worked across ethnic and religious lines to make valuable contributions to peace processes (see S/2004/814 and S/2005/636).

57. There is evidence that women in local government have a tangible impact on local policy decisions directed towards services and amenities that benefit women and in building social acceptance of women's political authority. For example, in India, studies in panchayats attest to the myriad ways in which the presence of women has changed local politics. It is reported that women have made the panchayats more responsive to community demands for infrastructure, housing, schools and health. Women have improved implementation of various Government programmes and their presence has made women citizens more likely to take advantage of State services and demand their rights. When women are heads of panchayats, there is a greater likelihood that policies that are sensitive to women's needs will be implemented.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

68. **Despite incremental changes over the past decade, women continue to face persistent challenges relating to their participation in decision-making. The slow increase in the number of women in political decision-making bodies is the result of a number of factors, including institutional and electoral engineering (such as the adoption of electoral quotas and reserved seats), political party commitment, sustained mobilization at the national level, in particular by the women's movement, and advocacy and support from the international community.**

69. **The increased participation of women in decision-making still needs, however, to be translated into leadership and influence in decision-making processes. Serious obstacles remain that hinder women's effective participation, including their underrepresentation in such male-dominated domains as the military, macroeconomic policy and foreign affairs; the absence of gender-sensitive enabling environments in such political institutions as parliaments and legislatures; and the persistence of traditional stereotypical attitudes and behaviour.**

70. **The lack of sex-disaggregated data on women's access to decision-making at all levels in such areas as the economy, the judiciary, the media, academia and international affairs, remains a serious constraint to monitoring progress.**

71. **The Commission may wish to consider recommending the actions set out below for increasing the participation of women in decision-making (see paras. 72 and 73) and enhancing the impact of their increased presence (see para. 74).**

72. **Governments at all levels, international actors, including the United Nations, parliaments, political parties, non-governmental organizations, the media and all other stakeholders, should, as appropriate:**

(a) **Establish concrete goals, targets and benchmarks for increasing women's representation, including through positive actions;**

(b) **Fully implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) so as to increase women's participation in decision-making in all aspects of peace and security, including rehabilitation and reconstruction;**

(c) **Ensure ratification and implementation of the relevant instruments relating to full political rights for women, in particular the Universal**

Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women;

(d) Enact specific measures to guarantee women's access to decision-making positions, including, as appropriate, through legislated quotas within a proportional representation system or reserved seats in majoritarian election systems, with specific and effective sanctions for non-compliance;

(e) Ensure that women and men have equal opportunities during election campaigns by providing public funding, access to the media, setting campaign spending limits, and ensuring that campaign finances and expenditures are disclosed;

(f) Ensure women's equal access to education and training, information, employment opportunities and productive resources so as to provide them with the necessary tools to participate fully and equally in decision-making processes at all levels;

(g) Develop and promote gender-sensitive curricula and training on civic education for men and women, use gender-sensitive language to eliminate stereotypes and encourage the portrayal of women as leaders in all areas of life;

(h) Review and revise, as necessary, existing constitutional, political, legislative and regulatory frameworks, including electoral systems, to remove provisions that hinder women's equal participation in decision-making processes at all levels;

(i) Facilitate research on the conditions under which women's representation is enhanced in political parties, parliaments and Government at all levels, and disseminate information on lessons learned and good practices;

(j) Monitor the media's coverage of women and gender equality issues and identify gender bias with respect to women in decision-making;

(k) Monitor and evaluate the participation and representation of women in decision-making processes at all levels, including through the regular collection of information and data disaggregated by sex.

73. Election management bodies and political parties should, as appropriate:

(a) Review party structures and procedures to remove all obstacles for women's participation, in particular in leadership positions, with the aim of achieving parity at all levels;

(b) Adopt clear rules for candidate selection within parties, including, as relevant, the implementation of quotas for achieving equitable representation of women candidates in elected positions;

(c) Promote women's candidacies through the adoption of specific training programmes, recruitment drives and financial incentives, in particular in majoritarian electoral systems, where women may face greater challenges in getting nominated;

(d) Provide women's branches in political parties, where they exist, with the necessary resources to increase visibility within the party structure, to influence decision-making and to support women's candidacies;

(e) **Ensure that women are included in decision-making positions within electoral management bodies and that due consideration is given to issues of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the work of such bodies;**

(f) **Provide resources for leadership training of potential women candidates across party lines in the skills required for political campaigning and for interacting effectively with the media.**

74. **Governments at all levels, international actors, including the United Nations, parliaments, political parties, non-governmental organizations, the media and all other stakeholders, should, as appropriate:**

(a) **Ensure that women have equal representation at decision-making levels in policymaking bodies covering all areas, in particular in the areas of macroeconomic policy, trade, labour, budgets, defence and foreign affairs;**

(b) **Support the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the formulation and implementation of laws, budget allocations, policies and programmes, through, inter alia, the provision of training in governmental, legislative and judicial bodies, and enhancement of the catalytic role of national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women;**

(c) **Ensure that institutions, including parliaments, develop an enabling environment for women's participation, including through measures aimed at reconciling family and professional responsibilities;**

(d) **Ensure that women in decision-making positions receive sufficient substantive and administrative support, mentoring and access to the resources required for effective leadership roles;**

(e) **Ensure that parliaments establish standing or ad hoc committees or other statutory bodies on gender equality and empowerment of women, with cross-party representation, to monitor the review and implementation of existing laws and constitutional provisions, as well as recommendations from international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action;**

(f) **Ensure that parliaments, including standing committees and women's caucuses, collaborate effectively with various national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women;**

(g) **Prior to their submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, for which they are prepared, disseminate the national periodic reports to parliament and civil society for discussion;**

(h) **Promote decentralization that is conducive to women's equal participation and strengthen capacity of local government bodies to implement effective gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive budgeting;**

(i) **Facilitate networking among women in decision-making positions and those working for the empowerment of women at the grass-roots level, in the academic community, trade unions, the media and in civil society organizations;**

(j) **Encourage and support alliances with men in decision-making positions to promote gender equality and empowerment of women;**

(k) **Provide leadership training to women to increase their potential to influence political, social and economic decisions, and to seek accountability from all elected representatives on commitments to gender equality and empowerment of women.**

Notes

[1] In response to the note verbale, the Division for the Advancement of Women received responses from the following 34 countries: Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Fiji, Grenada, Honduras, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Sweden, Tonga, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay.

[2] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[3] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 7* (E/2005/27), chap. I.

[4] *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 05.III.Y.1); A. M. Goetz and R. Jenkins, *Reinventing Accountability: Making Democracy Work for Human Development* (2004).

[5] IPU, "Women in National Parliaments", http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm; and International IDEA and Stockholm University, 2005, "Global Database of Electoral Quotas for Women", (http://www.quotaproject.org); Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2005, Women in Politics: 1945-2005, Geneva.

[6] Jean Drage, "Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific: a comparative analysis of thirteen countries", Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, June 2001.

[7] ILO, *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*, Geneva, 2004.

[8] United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, *Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women*, United Nations Development Programme, 2005.

[9] V. Bouvier, "Crossing the lines: women's social mobilization in Latin America", 2004, background paper for *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*.

[10] *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux, eds., 2002; F. Macaulay, "Getting gender on the policy agenda: a study of a Brazilian feminist lobby group", in *The Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*, E. Dore and M. Molyneux, eds. (Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

[11] Institute for Development Studies "Getting Institutions Right for Women in Development", *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 26, No. 3, 1995.

[12] V. Sperling, M. Marx Ferree and B. Risman, "Constructing Global Feminism: Transnational Advocacy Networks and Russian Women's Activism", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 26(4).

[13] *No shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policy-Making*, 2003, A. M. Goetz and S. Hassim eds., Zed, London.

[14] Rai, S. M., G. Bari, N. Mahtab and B. Mohanty, et al. (2005) "South Asia: Gender and the Politics of Empowerment: a comparative study", in *Women in Politics: Electoral Quotas, Equality and Democracy*, D. Dahlerup, ed., London, Routledge.